



Communist University

Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, 1845

The first work of Marxism: CU Short Version

DEFECTS OF MATERIALISM

- #1 *"The main defect of... materialism... [is that it is not conceived] as human sensuous activity, practice; not subjectively.*
- #2 *"The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth... in practice."*
- #3 *"The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances"*
- #6 *"...the essence of man is... the ensemble of the social relations.*
- #8 *"All social life is essentially practical."*
- #10 *"The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity."*
- #11 *"The point is to change the world."*

"the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy."

Karl Marx, Intro to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1844

The Abstract and the Concrete

In his Philosophical Notebooks, Lenin wrote:

"It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!"

In Evald Ilyenkov's "Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital", Ilyenkov wrote:

"As we know Hegel was the first to understand the development of knowledge as a historical process subject to laws that do not depend on men's will and consciousness. He discovered the law of ascent from the abstract to the concrete as the law governing the entire course of development of knowledge."

"In reality, the immediate basis of the development of thought is not nature as such but precisely the transformation of nature by social man, that is, practice."

The ascent from the abstract to the concrete means the assembly of the parts of a phenomenon as a means of understanding the phenomenon as a dynamic system, or in other words a unity and struggle of opposites, which is the concrete.

Science moves from the abstract parts to the concrete whole, and is then able to see the forward development that results from the struggle of opposites internal to the phenomenon.

English

In the English language, words that have important meaning have tended to develop a second and contradictory meaning. This seems especially to be the case where the words are critical to the class struggle.

In the case of the word "abstract", the proper meaning has to do with the empirically-determined objective and material parts of a phenomenon, whereas there is a commonplace usage of the word "abstract" that means intangible or merely mental as opposed to physical.

In the case of the word "concrete", a commonplace present-day usage makes it into a word meaning solid or physical, whereas the long-established meaning is a combination of abstract parts.

So once again we have a double problem to learn. We all have to struggle with the language (English-speakers, too) before we can succeed in our struggle with the meaning of the ideas. These ideas are necessary for us to do education, science, and "development".

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Our critical-pedagogy practice also depends upon sufficient of us understanding and positively insisting on the movement from the abstract to the concrete.

It means that we have to have facts in the first place.